

CHAPTER 12

THE YOG OF DEVOTION

Krishn repeatedly told Arjun at the end of Chapter 11 that his cosmic form which he had manifested to him had never been seen by anyone before and would not be seen by anyone in the future. Rather than being known by penance or yagya or charity he can be easily known and approached-as Arjun has seen him-by unwavering devotion and contemplation which is constant and uninterrupted like a stream of oil. So Arjun was exhorted to dedicate himself to Krishn and remember him; he should perform the ordained deed and better still by surrendering himself to him. Firm and single-minded devotion is the means for achievement of the supreme goal. This naturally whets Arjun's curiosity to know which one of the two kinds of devotees, they who worship the manifest God like Krishn and they who contemplate the unmanifest Spirit, are superior.

In fact, Arjun has raised this question for the third time here. He had asked Krishn in Chapter 3 why he was urging him to undertake a dreadful task if he thought the Way of Knowledge superior to the Way of Selfless Action. According to Krishn in both ways action is a necessity.

Despite this, however, if a man restrains his senses with unnatural violence and is yet unable to forget their objects, he is an arrogant impostor rather than a man of knowledge. So Arjun was counselled to do the ordained task, the deed of yagya. The mode of yagya, which is a special form of worship and which provides access to the supreme goal, was then elucidated. What difference is there then between the Way of Knowledge and the

Way of Selfless Action if the same action-the deed of yagya-has to be embarked on for both. Whereas an affectionate devotee engages in the deed of yagya after having surrendered himself and his action to the desired God, the yogi of knowledge undertakes the same action with a due understanding of his own strength and reliance upon it.

Arjun further wished to know from Krishn in Chapter 5 why he sometimes commended action done by the Way of Knowledge and at other times that done by the Way of Selfless Action in a spirit of self-surrender. He wanted to be told which of the two was better. He knew by that time that action was a common factor in both the ways. And yet he put the question to Krishn because he was faced with the problem of choosing the superior way. He was told that although seekers attain to the desired goal by going along either of the ways, the Way of Selfless Action is better than the Way of Knowledge. Without doing selfless action, a man can be neither a yogi nor truly enlightened. The Way of Knowledge is also impossible to traverse without action and it is beset with more obstacles.

Now, for the third time, Arjun asks the Lord which of the two kinds of devotees, they who are devoted to him with perfect concentration and they who go along the Way of Knowledge contemplating the unmanifest, imperishable principle, are superior.

1. **“Arjun said, ‘Which of the two kinds of steadfast devotees, they who always worship you in your embodied form and the others who meditate upon your imperishable, unmanifest Spirit, are superior in their mastery of yog?’”**

Whether they worship Krishn with self-surrender, a sense of identity with him, and with firm concentration, or they worship the unmanifest and imperishable God in whom he dwells with self-reliance rather than self-surrender, they both follow the way ordained by him. Which of the two, however, are superior? Krishn answers the question thus.

अर्जुन उवाच

एवं सततयुक्ता ये भक्तारस्त्वां पर्युपासते ।

ये चाप्यक्षरमव्यक्तं तेषां के योगवित्तमाः ॥१॥

2. **“The Lord said, ‘I believe them to be the most superior of all yogi who always meditate upon me with concentration and worship me (the embodied, manifest God) with true faith.”**
- 3-4. **“And they who restrain all their senses well, always adore the Supreme Spirit who is beyond thought, all-pervading, indefinable, filled with equanimity, immutable and immovable, and formless and indestructible , with total concentration, and who serve all beings viewing them with an equal eye, attain to me.”**

These attributes of God are not different from those of Krishn, but-

5. **“Achievement of perfection by men who are devoted to the formless God is more arduous, because they who feel conceited because of their physical bodies find it more difficult to realize the unmanifest.”**

Accomplishment is harder for worshippers who are devoted to the God who is devoid of all qualities (nirgun) because of their attachment to their physical existence. Attainment of the unmanifest, formless God is most difficult as long as a worshipper takes pride in his birth and prowess.

Yogeshwar Krishn was a Godlike accomplished teacher and the unmanifest God was manifested in him. According to him the seeker who, instead of seeking shelter under a sage, goes ahead with trust in his own strength, knowing his present situation and what it will be in the time to come, and with the awareness that he will ultimately realize his own unmanifest, identical Self, begins to

श्रीभगवानुवाचः मय्यावेश्य मनो ये मां नित्ययुक्ता उपासते ।
 श्रद्धया परयोपेतास्ते मे युक्ततमा मताः ॥२॥
 ये त्वक्षरमनिर्देण्यमव्यक्तं पर्युपासते ।
 सर्वणमचिन्त्यं च कूटस्थमचलं ध्रुवम् ॥३॥
 संनियम्येन्द्रियग्रामं सर्वं समबुद्धयः ।
 ते प्राप्नुवन्ति मामेव सर्वभूहिता रताः ॥४॥
 क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम् ।
 अव्यक्ता हि गतिर्दुःखं देहवद्भिरवाप्यते ॥५॥

think that the Supreme Spirit is no different from him and that he is “him.” Entertaining such thoughts and without waiting for fulfillment he begins to feel that his body itself is the real “he.” So he wanders about in the mortal world, the abode of sorrows, and at last comes to a dead end. But this is not so with the worshipper who goes ahead under Krishn’s gracious shelter.

6-7. “And, O Parth, I soon deliver my affectionate devotees who have set their mind on me and who, coming under my shelter and dedicating all their action to me, ever contemplate and worship me-the manifest God-with unshaken intentness, from the abyss of the mortal world.”

Krishn then prompts Arjun to such devotion and throws light upon the way by which it may be accomplished.

8. “There is no doubt whatsoever that you will dwell in me if you devote and apply your mind and intellect to me.”

Krishn is conscious of his disciple’s weakness, for Arjun has confessed earlier that he considers restraining the mind as difficult as restraining the wind, So he hastens to add:

9. “If you cannot firmly set your mind on me; O Dhananjay, seek me by the yog of incessant practice (abhyas-yog).”

“Practice” here means repeated drawing back of the mind from where-ever it roams and fixing it upon the desired goal. But if Arjun is incapable even of this, he should just long for Krishn-only devote himself to his worship, If all his thoughts and actions are only for Krishn, he will have the fulfillment of realizing him.

ये तु सर्वाणि कर्माणि मयि संन्यस्य मत्पराः ।
अनन्येनैव योगेन मां ध्यायन्त उपासते ॥६॥
तेषामहं समुद्धर्ता मृत्युसंसारसागरात् ।
भवामि नचिरात्पार्थ मय्यावेशितचेतसाम् ॥७॥
मय्येव मन आधत्स्व मयि बुद्धि निवेशय ।
निवासिष्यसि मय्येव अत ऊर्ध्वं न संशयः ॥८॥
अथ चित्तं समाधातुं न शक्नोषि मयि स्थिरम् ।
अभ्यासयोगेन ततो मामिच्छाप्तुं धनंजय ॥९॥

10. **“In case you are incapable of even following the way of practice, you may yet secure fulfillment by the performance of actions which are meant only for me.”**
11. **“In case you fail to accomplish even this, abandon all the fruits of action and take refuge in my yog with a thoroughly subdued mind.”**

If Arjun cannot even do this, he should give up all desire of the rewards of action as well as considerations of profit and loss, and with a sense of self-surrender find shelter under some sage with an accomplished Soul. The ordained action will then commence spontaneously under the prompting of this accomplished teacher.

12. **“Since knowledge is superior to practice, meditation better than knowledge, and abandonment of the fruits of action higher than meditation, renunciation is soon rewarded with peace.”**

To engage in action by the Way of Knowledge is better than just the exercise of restraining the mind. Meditation is better than the accomplishment of action through knowledge, because the desired goal is always present in contemplation. Even better than contemplation, however, is the abandonment of the fruits of action, for when Arjun has given up the fruits of action and surrendered himself to the desired goal with the purpose of realizing it, the burden of his exercise of yog is borne by the adored God. So this kind of renunciation is soon followed by the achievement of absolute peace.

Krishn has so far said that the yogi who performs selfless action with a sense of self-surrender has an advantage over the follower of the Way of Knowledge who worships the unmanifest. Both of them accomplish the same action, but there are more hurdles in

अभ्यासेऽप्यसमर्थोऽसि मत्कर्मपरमो भव ।
मदर्थमपि कर्माणि कुर्वन्सिद्धिं वाप्स्यसि ॥१०॥
अथैतदप्यशक्तोऽसि कर्तुं मद्योगमाश्रितः ।
सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं ततः कुरु यतात्मवान् ॥११॥
श्रेयो हि ज्ञानमभ्यासाज्ज्ञानाद्ध्यानं विशिष्यते ।
ध्यानात्कर्मफलत्यागस्त्यागाच्छान्तिरनन्तरम् ॥१२॥

the way of the latter. He bears the responsibility for his profits and losses himself, whereas the burden of the dedicated worshipper is borne by God. So he soon achieves peace as an outcome of his renunciation of the fruits of action. Krishn now enumerates the attributes of the man who attains to such tranquillity.

13-14. “The devotee who has malice towards none and loves all, who is compassionate and free from attachment and vanity, who views sorrow and joy equally and is forgiving, endowed with steady yog, contented alike with both profit and loss, restrained in mind, and dedicated to me with firm conviction, is dear to me.”

15. “The devotee who does not upset anyone, nor is upset by anyone, and who is free from the contradictions of joy, envy, and fear, is dear to me.”

Apart from these qualities, this worshipper is also one who neither agitates any being nor is agitated by any being, and who is free from joy, misery, fear, and all such distractions. Such a worshipper is beloved of Krishn.

This verse is most salutary for worshippers, for they should so conduct themselves that they do not hurt anyone’s feeling. They have to be so, although others will not act in the same way. Being worldly-minded they cannot but indulge in venomous fulminations. However, whatever they say to denounce and hurt should not disturb and interrupt the seeker’s meditation. Whatever they do, his thoughts should be steadily and constantly set on the coveted God. It is his duty to protect himself from the onslaughts of men who are-as it were-intoxicated and out of their senses.

अद्वेष्टा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च ।
निर्ममो निरहंकारः समुदःखसुख क्षमी ॥१३॥
संतुष्ट सततं योगी यतात्मा दृढनिश्चयः ।
मध्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥१४॥
यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते चयः ।
हर्षामर्षभयोद्वेगैर्मुक्तो यः स च मे प्रियः ॥१५॥

16. **“The devotee who is emancipated from desire, pure, dexterous at his task, impartial, free from sorrow, and who has achieved the state of actionlessness, is dear to me.”**

That man is pure who is liberated from desire. “Dexterous” means that he is adept in worship and meditation, the one ordained action. He is unaffected by fortune and misfortune, free from sorrow, and one who has given up all undertakings because there is left no worthwhile enterprise on which he can embark.

17. **“The devotee who is neither joyous nor envious, neither troubled nor concerned, and who has given up all good and evil actions, is dear to me.”**

This is the crowning point of devotion when the worshipper is not wanting in anything that is worthy nor in possession of anything that is impious. The worshipper who has reached this stage is dear to Krishn.

- 18-19. **“The steady worshipper, who regards friends and foes, honour and dishonour, cold and heat, happiness and sorrow, as equal, and who is detached from the world, indifferent to slander and praise, meditative, contented with any manner of physical sustenance, and free from infatuation for the place where he dwells, is dear to me.**

20. **“And the devotees who rest in me and taste well the aforesaid nectar of dharm in a spirit of selflessness are the dearest to me.”**

अनपेक्षः शुचिर्दक्ष उदासीनो गतव्यथः ।
सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥१६॥
यो न हृष्यति न द्वेष्टि न शोचति न काङ्क्षति ।
शुभाशुभपरित्यागी भक्तिमान्यः स मे प्रियः ॥१७॥
समः शत्रौ च मित्रे तथा मानापमानयोः ।
शीतोष्णसुखदुःखेषु समः सङ्गविवर्जितः ॥१८॥
तुल्यनिन्दास्तुतिर्मौनी संतुष्टो येन केनचित् ।
अनिकेतः स्थिरमतिर्भक्तिमान्मे प्रियो नरः ॥१९॥
ये तु धर्म्यामृतमिदं यथोक्तं पर्युपासते ।
श्रद्धधाना मत्परमा भक्तास्तेऽतीव मे प्रियाः ॥२०॥

In the concluding verse of the chapter, Krishn adds that he loves those devotees most who take refuge in him and partake well of the aforesaid imperishable substance of dharm.



At the close of the last chapter, Krishn told Arjun that neither had anyone seen him earlier nor would anyone see him later as he had beheld him. But one who worships him with steady devotion and affection is able to see him, know his essence, and become one with him. In other words, the Supreme Spirit is an entity who can be realized. So Arjun should be a loving devotee.

At the outset of the present chapter Arjun wished to know from Krishn which of the two kinds of devotees, they who worship him with single-minded dedication and they who contemplate the imperishable, unmanifest God, are superior. According to Krishn, he is realized by devotees of both kinds because he too is unmanifest. However, there are more painful hurdles in the path of seekers who are dedicated to the unmanifest God with a well-restrained mind. So long as the shell of the physical body remains, attainment of the formless God is painful, because this unmanifest form is attained only when the mind is thoroughly subdued and dissolved. Before that stage his body itself stands as an obstruction in the worshipper's way. Saying time and again- "I am."-"I am."-"I have to attain."-he at last turns to his body itself. There is thus a greater chance of his stumbling on the way. So Arjun should surrender all his actions to Krishn and remember him with steady devotion, for he soon liberates from the dark chasm of the world devotees who meditate upon him with the unbroken constancy of a stream of oil, with total dependence on him, and after resigning all their actions to him. So the way of affectionate devotion is the most superior.

Arjun should aim his mind at Krishn. If he cannot thus control his mind, however, he should take to the way of constant practice. He should withdraw his mind again and again from wherever it strays and restrain it. If he is unable to do this, either, he should just engage in action. The action is only one-the deed of yagya. He

should just go on doing what is fit to be done, and do nothing else. Whether success comes to him or not, he should persevere with the ordained action. If, unfortunately, he is incapable of even this, he should renounce the fruits of all action and find shelter under a sage who has known reality, realized his Self, and dwells in the Supreme Spirit. This renunciation will bring him the ultimate peace.

Thereafter, Krishn has enumerated attributes of the devotee who achieves such peace. Free from ill-will towards all beings, he is endowed with compassion and pity. Free equally from attachment and vanity, this devotee is beloved of Krishn. The worshipper who is ever absorbed in contemplation, self-possessed, and dwelling in his Soul is dear to him. The seeker who neither hurts anyone nor is hurt by anyone is dear to him. The devotee who is pure, dexterous in his task, beyond all sorrow, and who has steered his way across by renouncing all desire and good as well as evil actions, is dear to him. The steady, enlightened, and loving devotee who is equable and uncomplaining in both glory and ignominy, whose mind and senses are restrained and stilled, who is contented with any manner of living, and free from attachment to the body in which he dwells, is dear to him.

This enumeration of the way of life of worshippers who have attained to the ultimate peace continues from the eleventh to the nineteenth verse, which are therefore of great value to seekers. Giving the final verdict at last, Krishn tells Arjun that devotees of steady faith who cast themselves at his mercy and mould their conduct with a spirit of selflessness according to the eternal, indestructible nectar of dharm which he has enunciated before, are the dearest to him. So engaging in the appointed task in a spirit of total self-surrender is the best course, because in this way the responsibility for the worshipper's gains and losses is borne by his noble teacher-preceptor. At this point Krishn also points out the attributes of sages who dwell in the Supreme Spirit and counsels Arjun to find shelter under them. At the very end, by prompting Arjun to take refuge in him, he declares himself on par with these sages.

Since "devotion" is said to be the most superior way in this chapter, it is appropriate to name it "The Yog of Devotion."

**Thus concludes the Twelfth Chapter, in the Upanishad of the
Shreemad Bhagwad Geeta, on the Knowledge of the
Supreme Spirit, the Discipline of Yog, and the Dialogue
between Krishn and Arjun, entitled:
“Bhakti Yog,” or “The Yog of Devotion”**

**Thus concludes Swami Adgadanand’s exposition of the
Twelfth Chapter of the Shreemad Bhagwad Geeta in
“Yatharth Geeta”**

HARI OM TAT SAT